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FM AMEMBASSY VILNIUS  
TO RUEHXP/ALL NATO POST COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 0029  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA PRIORITY 0001  
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU PRIORITY 0026  
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0010  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0088  
RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY 0041  
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY 0017  
RUEHMS/AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY 0007  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0016  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0047  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3712

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000462

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB, EUR/RPM, SCA/A

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TAGS: [AF](#) [LH](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN STILL A PRIORITY AMID BUDGET CRISIS

REF: A. VILNIUS 457

[1](#)B. VILNIUS 194

[1](#)C. VILNIUS 188

[1](#)D. VILNIUS 172

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DAMIAN LEADER, FOR REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In separate meetings on August 28 we met with MFA's Deputy Director of the Transatlantic Cooperation and Security Policy Department Simonas Satunas and with MOD's Senior Counselor (Political Director) Andrius Krivas to discuss both NATO operations and strategy in Afghanistan, in particular President Dalia Grybauskaite's August 25 meeting with NATO Secretary General Fogh Anders Rasmussen. Our MFA and MOD interlocutors both raised concerns about the financial crisis and its potential impact on the GOL mission in Afghanistan, but said Lithuania remains committed to its military mission in Afghanistan. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Satunas briefed us on President Grybauskaite's August 25 meeting with NATO Secretary General Rasmussen in Brussels. Satunas said that Grybauskaite raised concerns about NATO contingency plans for Lithuania and for the Baltic States. Grybauskaite confirmed the GOL's intention to stay the course in Afghanistan, but she also noted that continued pressure on the government's budget as a result of the severe economic crisis could force the GOL to reevaluate its ability to finance its military operations in Afghanistan. She also stressed with Rasmussen the need for more international support to finance development projects in Ghor. Satunas said the GOL will present its new Afghanistan strategy, which would extend the current mandate for troops on the ground from the end of 2010 to the end of 2013, to the Parliament (Seimas) in the beginning of Autumn. Satunas noted that the GOL is anxious to obtain Seimas approval of the Afghanistan strategy as soon as possible in case the economic crisis becomes more difficult.

[1](#)3. (C) Krivas said that the mission in Afghanistan remains a top priority even as the MOD struggles with a 25% budget cut. Krivas explained that the MOD has already taken some tough decisions as a result of economic pressure including downsizing its network of Defense Attaches in foreign posts, reducing GOL representation in NATO structures and decreasing its participation in international missions and operations including the KFOR platoon in Kosovo. Krivas said that the GOL wants to maintain current troop levels with the exception of the increased number of SOF troops in Afghanistan's RC

South, who will return home in November. He explained that the increase in SOF is seasonal because hostile activities decrease during winter months. When asked if the GOL would send more SOF troops to Afghanistan next summer he hesitated and said that it would depend on the budget. Krivas elaborated that the new Government debated about sending the additional SOF troops this year. However Parliament members in the Committees of Foreign Affairs and National Security and Defense successfully argued in favor of the increase.

¶4. (C) Krivas said that the MOD's biggest problems in Afghanistan are 1) a lack of civilian reconstruction resources and 2) Kabul's lack of attention to the Ghor province. Tomas Urbonas, the Head of the MOD's International Operations Section, told us that civilian assistance is critical for Ghor province to build a sustainable economy, a functioning civil administration and to shore up security. He noted that the proposed project to build a road from Kabul to Herat would open a trade route for Ghor residents to sell agricultural goods in both cities. At present it takes two days to travel the 300km of treacherous terrain to reach either city making the transport of commercial goods to and from Ghor near impossible.

¶5. (SBU) Krivas said that the GOL is moving forward with plans to hold an RC West Conference in Vilnius this December. He suggested that the conference would be an opportunity to discuss Ghor development projects with potential donors. He echoed the MFA's recent request (reftel) for a high level USG official to speak at the conference.

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¶6. (C) Comment: Our MFA and MOD interlocutors assured us that Lithuania's military commitment in Afghanistan is solid, notwithstanding Grybauskaite's recent statements. However, her statements are clear indications of the government's concerns regarding its ability to continue financing that commitment. Should the economy continue to languish and more budget cuts loom, we expect intensified political pressure for Lithuania to reduce its presence in Afghanistan -- unless other countries are able to assist it. End comment.  
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